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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of two surveys, compares them to previous research, and discusses the combined implications. Both surveys, (the first, conducted in Denmark in 1969; and the second, in Chicago and Evanston, Illinois, in 1971) reinforced previous findings of significant correlations between attitudes toward freedom of speech and the variables of age, sex, education, and urbanization. The author further discusses liberality of attitude as correlated with intravariable differences such as was found among younger and older adults, and suburban and central city residents, etc. From the collective research data a hypothesis is derived, namely, that levels of tolerance increase or diminish as the modes of expression in question appear to serve or threaten vested interests. (Author/LG)

The Relationship of Age, Sex, Education and Urbanization to Free Speech Attitudes

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Franklyn S. Haiman
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Introduction

The purposes of this paper are to report the findings of two survey research projects I have undertaken, to compare them to the results of previous studies, and to suggest some implications as to their meaning and significance.

It is difficult to make direct comparisons across various survey results, since each survey employs its own unique phrasing of questions, and since there seem to be some differences in attitudes toward freedom of speech depending on whether the expression in question is political, religious, or sexually-oriented. Nevertheless general trends and patterns can be discerned.

Review of Previous Research

The first series of studies of relevance to my concerns regarding age, sex, education, and urbanization variables were those reported by H.H. Remmers in Anti-Democratic Attitudes in American Schools (Northwestern University Press, 1963). Based on surveys done by the Purdue Opinion Panel during 1951 and 1952 among high school students across the United States, analyses were made of representative samples of the population to determine whether there were any differences along the lines of the variables identified here. The questions asked in the survey were grouped into five general scales, one described as "A Belief in the Bill of Rights" and another as "General Fascist Ideology." Although only some of the items dealt with freedom of speech, high inter-item correlations were found with the other areas of inquiry. A statistical analysis by Roy Horton of a sample of 1,000 students revealed clear correlations between

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libertarian attitudes and urbanization, as well as between libertarian attitudes and geographical regions. Students living in metropolitan centers were significantly more liberal than rural subjects. The Northeast and Western regions of the country were found to be more liberal than the Midwest, with the South trailing behind. Although females scored higher than males on Fascist ideology, they also scored higher on Belief in the Bill of Rights -- a seemingly contradictory result, though possibly explainable by a greater tendency of females to agree with the socially approved Bill of Rights items. A factor analytic analysis of a 9,000 student sample by Robert Corder also found the regional and urbanization correlations described by Horton.

A second series of studies providing data with respect to our present concerns were those conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup) and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) in 1954 and reported by Samuel Stouffer in Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties (John Wiley & Sons, 1955). Over 6,000 interviews were conducted, designed to determine attitudes particularly toward Communism, as well as general tolerance for non-conformists. The "tolerance for non-conformists" scale contained such free speech items as one's willingness to let a socialist, or an atheist, or an alleged communist, or an admitted communist speak, teach, or have his books in the public library.

This research produced clear patterns of correlation between tolerance for non-conformists and the variables of age, education, region, and urbanization. Younger people were consistently more liberal than older people; more highly educated groups were more liberal than those with less education; metropolitan areas were highest in liberalism followed in order by other cities, small towns, and farms; and the West led the geographical regions in liberalism followed by the Northeast, Midwest and South in that order. Although there

is interaction between these variables which exaggerates the contrasts (e.g. younger people are also more highly educated and the more highly educated groups tend to be more urbanized), each variable, standing by itself, also produced statistically significant differences.

Stouffer speculates that possible reasons for the greater tolerance of non-conformists found among the more urbanized groups is that they "rub shoulders" with a more heterogeneous population and are also more likely to have moved from country to city, thus experiencing "culture shock" and the need to assimilate the values of two worlds. He offers this mobility factor also as a possible explanation for the high liberality of the western region of the U.S.

Another study conducted by the Gallup Poll in May, 1969, involving some 1500 subjects aged 21 and older, asked respondents whether they would find nude pictures in magazines objectionable, and likewise with respect to nude actors or actresses in a theatrical performance. Significant differences were found between age groups and educational levels, following the same patterns as those reported earlier. Men were also found to be significantly more tolerant on these questions than women.

Osborne and Gorden, in a survey of 741 students at Kent State University in October, 1969, also found some differences between the attitudes of males and females, but not consistently on all items. Differences did occur on questions dealing with nudity and pornography, and on the item, "Anyone has a right to criticize or oppose government policy or officials," -- a statement which elicited more agreement from men than women.

In 1969-70, as part of a long-term project of the Education Commission of the States, called the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a survey was made of "citizenship" attitudes among 13-year olds (N-1855), 17-year olds (N-2214), and adults (N-920), in which the subjects were asked,

among other things, whether they favored allowing the following statements on radio: (1) "Russia is better than the United States," (2) "Some races of people are better than others," and (3) "It is not necessary to believe in God."

Since the survey did not provide data as to possible differentiations by age among the adults, we can only compare the adult group as a whole with 17-year olds and with 13-year olds. That comparison reveals that the adult population is more liberal than the 17-year olds, who are in turn more liberal than the 13-year olds. This suggests that the correlation between age and liberality is not a linear one, but rather that liberality increases through childhood into young adulthood, and after that point begins to decline again.

The National Assessment survey found, in all age groups, on these particular free speech items, that males were more liberal than females. It also found a pattern of regional differences similar to those of the earlier reported studies, with the only difference being that the Northeast was slightly more liberal than the West. With respect to urbanization, the metropolitan centers were again found to be the most liberal, medium towns next, and small towns the least. This survey also provides data separately on suburban and central city sub-groups within the metropolitan sample, which reveals suburbanites to be consistently more liberal than central city residents.

Danish Study

In the Spring and Summer of 1969, I conducted a survey on free speech attitudes in Denmark, the details of which are reported in a monograph published in the journal of the University of Copenhagen's Sociological Institute (copies available from the author). It involved personal interviews, by Danish graduate students, with a sample of 180 Danes, representing four degrees of urbanization -- rural villages and countryside, moderate-sized towns, Copenhagen central city, and Copenhagen suburbs.

As in previous research in the United States, clear and consistent linear correlations emerged along age and educational lines. Since the youngest subjects were 19, we did not receive data which might have shown less liberal attitudes among younger children. Urbanization also proved to be significantly correlated with liberality, Copenhagen and its suburbs being consistently the most permissive, moderate-sized towns next, rural villages and farms last, on all items in the survey. Of particular interest was the fact that on some items, the residents of the Copenhagen suburbs were more liberal than those of the central city, whereas on other items there were no significant differences between the two populations. For example, suburbanites were more accepting of pornographic material and of the advocacy of revolution than central city residents, but there were no differences between the two groups in attitudes toward street demonstrations or toward the spreading of Communist propaganda.

Differences between male and female respondents in Denmark were significant and consistent across all survey items, and seemed to be larger than any that have been found in the American studies. Danish males, for example, favored the abolition of legal restrictions on pornographic literature by 75%, to 25% opposed, while Danish females were only 45% in favor and 55% opposed. With respect to pornographic pictures, 69% of Danish males and only 39% of the females favored permitting their publication. On a closely comparable question asked by Gallup in the U.S. in 1969, males found nudes in magazines objectionable by a ratio of 66% to 34% as compared to the female ratio of 80% to 20% -- sex differences of only 15 percentage points as compared to the 30 percentage point gap in Denmark.

When asked if there should be legal restrictions on the spreading of Communist propaganda, Danish males responded 43% positive and 57% negative, whereas females responded 68% positive and 32% negative -- a spread of 25 percentage points. In contrast, when American adults were asked by the National Assessment of Educational Progress if the statement that "Russia is

better than the United States" should be allowed on the radio, 58.5% of the males said yes and 53.8% of the females said yes -- a difference of only five percentage points.

One hypothesis that was suggested as a possible explanation for these differences between Denmark and the U.S. was that the role of women in Europe has been traditionally more circumscribed than in the United States, and that their liberation, now well advanced in Scandinavia, came relatively late. This explanation would lead one to expect that the differences between Danish male and female respondents on free speech attitudes would be smaller among the younger age groups than among their elders. This did not, in fact, turn out to be the case. On the two questions which produced the largest difference between men and women as a whole, the abolition of film censorship and the prohibition of Communist propaganda, the differences between men and women under the age of 40, and also under the age of 30, were just as great as the differences in the oldest age groups. The explanation will apparently have to be sought elsewhere.

Chicago-Evanston Study

My second survey was conducted in the Spring of 1971, and consisted of 59 telephone interviews with a random sample of Chicago and Evanston residents, 30 in the former category and 29 in the latter. This study was designed particularly to pursue the matter of possible differences in attitudes between suburbanites and central city residents. It provided, at the same time, additional data on the age, sex, and education variables, as well as some interesting information on possible racial differences.

In contrast to my Danish research, as well as to some of the American studies reviewed earlier, no significant sex differences occurred in this survey. This was true even of such matters as nudity on the movie screen.

Although there was some slight difference in attitudes toward the use of obscene language in public places, it did not approach a statistically significant level.

As in all earlier research, correlations between liberality and educational level, and liberality and age, were again found to be consistent and significant.

The data on suburban-central city differences provide some interesting comparisons and contrasts to the Danish findings. Like their Copenhagen counterparts, Chicagoans are less tolerant of obscenity than are their suburban neighbors. In contrast to Denmark, however, American central city residents are more willing to place curbs on Communist propaganda than are suburbanites.

In both the Copenhagen metropolitan area and the Chicago metropolitan area, the general pattern was the same -- suburbanites being at least as permissive as central city residents and often more so. The one striking exception occurred on an item that was asked only in the American study, eliciting attitudes toward residential picketing. Here, Chicagoans and Evanstonians dramatically reversed their positions, with 9 out of 29 Evanstonians (30%) saying that residential picketing should be illegal, whereas only 3 out of 30 Chicagoans (or 10%) took that position. I will return in a moment to speculate on the significance of this result.

First, however, let me report some interesting findings on racial differences -- an area that has been little explored with respect to attitudes toward freedom of speech. Despite the generally lower level of education of the Black respondents interviewed, which should have inclined them to less liberal positions than the more highly educated White sample, Blacks were in fact more permissive than Whites with regard to street

demonstrations, residential picketing, and advocacy of revolution. They were less permissive with respect to the spreading of Nazi propaganda, and showed no significant differences with regard to obscenity in movies and or communist propaganda.

Conclusion

It would appear, in connection with Stouffer's hypothesis of exposure to diversity as an explanation for the liberalizing effect of urbanization, that another qualifying hypothesis may be in order. This hypothesis would hold that levels of tolerance also increase or diminish as the modes of expression in question appear to serve or to threaten vested interests. Thus, residential picketing is viewed as less threatening by city dwellers than suburbanites because they have less privacy to lose by it; obscene literature is viewed less favorably by females than by males because it tends to be an expression of male domination; street demonstrations and advocacy of revolution are viewed less sympathetically by Whites than by Blacks because it is the latter group who may have the greater need to use them, and the former group which is likely to be more threatened by them.

This is not to deny the validity of the hypothesis that exposure to conflicting values has a liberalizing effect on free speech attitudes, but only to suggest that such an effect can be offset, at least in part, by the intrusion of one's perceived vested interests.